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EDITORIAL

Let's Turn On!

SOMETHING OF UNUSUAL importance may have happened at the convention of the American Medical Association in San Francisco. Only time will tell whether medicine found a unity, an inspiration and a sense of purpose in this beautiful city that is so vibrantly alive. Quite properly, the House of Delegates was the scene. The incoming president of the AMA, the president of the Student AMA (SAMA) and a frustrated spokesman for a poorly identified "Medical Committee for Human Rights" were among the principal players. The script was impressive. The message was one of vision, energy and optimism for the future of American medicine and for its principal aim, "The betterment of the public health."

No physician or student of health care should fail to read and ponder the meaning of the two extraordinarily perceptive statements of Dwight L. Wilbur to the House of Delegates. They were entitled "Emphasize Steering Instead of the Brake" and, a more detailed commentary, "Cockroaches and Cherrystones." Both have been published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.^{*} C. Clement Lucas, Jr., expressed the deep social commitment and very positive activism of today's medical students with feeling and conviction. And, largely unheard (the microphones were not working at the time) was the uninvited

spokesman for a "Medical Committee for Human Rights" who surprisingly echoed much that the others were saying, if one ignores his infatuation with compulsory medicine and his equally out-moded cries of racism and discrimination.

Quite unexpectedly, what comes through in all four of these statements is a deep reaffirmation of the humanitarian goals which have always been medicine's reason for being, and a conviction that these must now be pursued by the profession with new energy and new action—with a new *activism*, if one use the language of the day. It seems most significant that these expressions reflect both youth and experience within the profession, and both the "ins" and the "outs" as far as organized medicine is concerned. This constitutes quite a remarkable unity.

It remains to be seen whether the message was heard or whether a significant new professional activism will in fact come into being. There is surely nothing novel about humanitarian goals in medicine, but there is a lot to be learned and a lot to be done about the technology of achieving these goals in modern society. Practicing physicians and organized medicine have long been activists in the technology of medical science. An entirely comparable activism on the part of the medical profession is now needed in the technology necessary to achieve the humanitarian and economic goals of health care in this great nation. And, just as is the case with medical science, this can best be done in collaboration with others of like purpose, whether in or out of government.

The message from San Francisco is that such a new activism on the part of organized medicine could "turn on" the young physicians, mobilize hitherto untapped sources of energy and bring

^{*}JAMA, 205:89-96, 8 July 1968.